United Nations
Development Update

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"We are on our way to forging a new United Nations for the post-Cold War period," Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali told top UN officials at the most recent of a series of meetings for reviewing follow-up on development goals set in the 1990s and assigning responsibility for new initiatives.

The "window of opportunity" opened by accords reached at the Social Summit and other global development conferences, initiatives for African economic recovery, and strengthened UN cooperation with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank were discussed at the 3-4 June meeting chaired by James Gustave Speth, Administrator of the UN Development Programme (UNDP).

The Secretary-General recognized the importance of these meetings under the leadership of Mr. Speth in bringing top UN development leaders together and enhancing UN-wide cooperation. The new coordinating responsibilities assigned to Mr. Speth by the Secretary-General were announced on 27 July 1994.

Participants at the senior officials' meeting stressed the need to treat follow-up to UN conferences as an integrated whole. The meeting recommended a programme-by-programme approach, to be coordinated initially at the headquarters level through task forces and subsequently implemented at the country and regional levels. The central role at the country level of the UNDP Resident Coordinators and of the UN economic commissions at the regional level was emphasized. The proposed task forces would be oriented around themes such as social services for all, access of the poor to productive assets, creation of an enabling environment for poverty eradication and social development, sustainable agriculture and rural development, and gender equality and advancement of women.

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UN Congress extends frontiers of crime prevention

Organized crime - terrorism link debated

New measures for combating international crime syndicates, terrorism, ecological crimes, violence inflicted on women, illegal traffic in aliens and corruption of public officials were recommended by the Ninth United Nations Congress on the Prevention of Crime and the Treatment of Offenders, held 29 April - 8 May in Cairo, Egypt.

Emphasizing that the UN regards crime as a crucial development issue, UN Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali said in his message to the Congress that "economies in crisis, or in a delicate period of transition, need help from the international community to combat the dangers posed by crime."

Endorsement by the Congress of a wide array of measures to combat transnational crime reflects the growing consensus among Governments and experts that international cooperation is a necessity if the rapid spread of criminal syndicates is to be stemmed, according to UN Crime Branch officials. The Vienna-based Branch organized the Crime Congress under the direction of the UN Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice.

An early focus of the Congress was on a draft resolution, cosponsored by Egypt and Turkey, calling attention to links between terrorism and organized crime and which urged concerted international action to combat both.

Several delegations and experts pointed out that condemning both kinds of organizations should not be taken to mean that terrorist organizations are simply an adjunct to crime syndicates. Such an identification, it was noted, might lead to injustices against organizations or popular causes incorrectly labelled as "terrorist." The delegate from South Africa remarked that only a few years ago, most members of the current Government of his country were categorized in this fashion. Iran asserted its opposition to terrorism, but cautioned that there is no universally accepted definition of the term, and it

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Governments sign up for action on forests

A central forum for discussions on the management of the world's forests was established by the UN Commission on Sustainable Development at its II 28 April session in New York. The work of the new Intergovernmental Panel will be to develop criteria for defining sustainable forest use, analyse causes of deforestation and ways to prevent it, and study the advisability of an international forestry convention.

Broad-based support for the Intergovernmental Panel reflects a rising level of understanding between developing and developed countries since the 1992 Conference on Environment and Development in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. Concerned that continued felling of tropical forests could wipe out rich wildlife habitats and threaten the planet's ability to transform sufficient quantities of carbon dioxide into oxygen, developed countries pushed for an international legal agreement on forests during preparations for Rio. Developing countries pointed out that the rich countries had already used up much of the world's forests in the process of achieving economic growth. They asserted that all forests should be included in any plan for sustainable development and that their sovereignty over their own natural resources should be respected.

Agreement was reached at Rio on a statement of principles for forest management and on proposals on forests contained in Agenda 21, Rio's programme of action. Since Rio a variety of management techniques have been discussed in small-group meetings of States. These meetings also served to build confidence between developing and developed countries, leading to the establishment of the Intergovernmental Panel to focus discussions of forestry issues.

Since trade in forest products is a major concern the Panel will develop methods for calculating the full cost to the environment of producing forest goods. The aim is to require producers to pay for these costs, which would probably also add to market prices for forest goods and services. In part, this will involve coordinating work that has been underway in various bodies since Rio to develop both criteria to define the sustainable use of forests and indicators for measuring sustainability.

Eco-Friendly Forestry

Work on criteria and indicators is expected to broaden the understanding of the economic functions of forests not just in terms of timber, but also as habitats and sources of food and medicine. There is hope that this will lead to a strategy for implementing the Rio accords, which value forests as vital and complex biospheres that serve as the "lungs" of the Earth.

Much of the Panel's work on criteria for sustainable development of forests will be directed towards certifying that goods and services are produced in an "eco-friendly" manner. This issue remains controversial. Many companies that manufacture timber products and some timber-exporting Governments want the Commission to adopt global certification criteria. An alternative view is that a variety of guidelines adopted to regional and local conditions, drawn up by local watchdog groups working in tandem with private industry, would work better.

The Panel is to report on its work to the Commission on Sustainable Development, which monitors implementation of the Rio accords. The first report is scheduled for 1996 and a final report is due in 1997.

Also at the third-annual session, the Commission:

- asked Governments to become involved in changing patterns of production and consumption, for example, by removing subsidies which artificially lower fuel prices and encourage inefficient consumption;
- called for a worldwide reduction in the level of lead in petroleum. Governments are asked to develop national action plans for achieving the reduction. Wealthier countries are to help developing countries obtain the technology to make the transition to lead-free products;
- supported the Local Agenda Initiative, in which all "stakeholders" (local communities, Governments, industry and non-governmental organizations) will produce and sustainably manage local development plans.

The Commission's 28-28 April high-level segment was attended by some 50 high-level ministers of finance, environment, labour and development cooperation. Participants concluded that the wide range of environmental initiatives undertaken in the last three years was indicative of the Commission's growing influence. They also pointed to a need to analyse the impact of environmentally related trade policies — such as eco-labelling, packaging and recycling requirements — on trade with developing countries and countries in transition. ■

UN economic outlook on the mid-90s

World economic growth has reached 3 per cent a year, which for the moment appears to be sustainable, according to the United Nations' *World Economic and Social Survey 1995*. Projected growth for 1995 is 2.75 per cent in the developed countries, 5 per cent in the developing countries, and 6 per cent in the countries in transition. The authors warn, however, that if growth slackens, it will be difficult to employ traditional measures to stimulate national economies. This is largely due to the need to maintain the confidence of highly volatile financial markets through policies which stress monetary and fiscal stability.

The report is produced by the UN Department for Economic and Social Information and Policy Analysis, and is released in connection with the 6 July meeting of high level international financial policy makers with the Economic and Social Council meeting in Geneva.

In 1996, the *Survey* predicts, economies in transition will enjoy their first year of overall growth since the collapse of Communism — and the turnaround to positive growth may already have been achieved. ■

Second PrepCom group drafting Global Plan of Action

Habitat II makes room for local authorities

Local town and city officials will have an unprecedented voice at the 1996 United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II) if a recommendation by its Preparatory Committee wins General Assembly approval.

The proposal "represents a significant step," according to Martti Lauanen, Chairman of the Preparatory Committee. The PrepCom launched the idea during its second session, held 24 April-5 May in Nairobi, Kenya.

Called "the City summit" by Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali, Habitat II will deal with the urgent need for a sustainable human environment and adequate shelter for all in a rapidly urbanizing world. It will take place in Istanbul, Turkey, 3-14 June 1996, twenty years after the first Habitat Conference was held in Vancouver, Canada.

"Local authorities construct, operate and maintain systems, social and environmental infrastructure, oversee the planning process, establish local environmental policies and regulations, and assist in implementing national and sub-national environment policies," said Habitat II Secretary-General Dr. Wally N'Dow. Referring to mayors, city council members, town managers and other officials as "the real captains of human settlements," he noted that "as the level of government closest to the people, they play a vital role in educating, mobilizing and responding to the public and promoting sustainable development."

While local authorities will not be able to vote in Istanbul, they will have an enhanced presence together with non-governmental organizations and private sector. To accomplish this, the PrepCom urged that Habitat II "needs to become a Conference of Partnerships," and it called for a broad-based participation "of all relevant actors" both in the preparatory process and the Conference itself.

"The design of the Conference is inclusive, providing a forum for the major stakeholders to bring forward what they see as strategic issues and their commitments to solve these issues in the frame of the Global Plan of Action," Mark Hildebrand told *Development Update*. Mr. Hildebrand is Acting Director of Programme Coordination and Administration at the UN Centre for Human Settlements, the Nairobi-based agency serving as secretariat for Habitat II.

The second PrepCom established a drafting group to continue work on a Global Plan of Action for the sustainable development of the world's cities, towns and villages, an "Urban Agenda 21" for the next century. The draft discussed during the two-week session contained a statement of principles relating to peace, family, international solidarity, cooperation and assistance, government responsibility and civic engagement, sustainability, equity and partnership.

Chaired by Dr. Glynn Khonje (Zambia) and composed of regionally representative members, the drafting group will meet in Nairobi in mid-July and, if needed, in New York in October. The draft will be forwarded to all Member States for comments, which will be incorporated in a final document to be circulated at least six weeks prior to the third PrepCom in New York, 12-23 February 1996.

"To have the negotiating committee set up 13 months in advance of the Istanbul conference gives us hope that we will have enough time to come up with a really strategic and implementable document," commented Mr. Hildebrand.

The Preparatory Committee also made recommendations concerning the criteria for nomination and selection of "Best practices for improving living environments" for presentation at Habitat II. Such practices would be valuable inputs to the Conference, allowing for the sharing of information on effective ways to address urban problems. The International Conference on Best Practices will be held in Dubai, United Arab Emirates, 19-22 November 1995. ■

NGO Forum on Women resolves venue

Agreement has been reached on suitable facilities for the NGO Forum on Women '95, taking place in conjunction with the September 1995 Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, China. The June agreement resolves a dispute over access to the main conference site that threatened non-governmental organization (NGO) participation in the Women's Conference.

"We sincerely believe that the terms of the agreement will enable the holding of a celebratory and substantive Forum, the kind women worldwide have been planning for the past two years," said Supatra Masdit, the NGO Forum convenor.

Special Adviser to the Secretary-General Ismat Kittani negotiated the agreement between the Forum and the China Organizing Committee after an inspection of the Beijing facilities for the Women's Conference as well as the Forum site in the town of Huairou, over 50 kilometres from the conference site.

The dispute orginated in late March 1995, when the China Organizing Committee proposed re-locating the Forum at the Huairou site. The Organizing Committee said it had determined that the facilities originally chosen — which are located within Beijing — were structurally unsafe. The proposal to house the Forum so far away from the site of the Conference prompted protests from NGOs. Concerns were expressed that the grounds of the NGO Forum were not contiguous and that arrangements for transporation and communication with the main conference site were inadequate. NGO representatives were concerned that these difficulties would have the overall effect of marginalizing the voices of NGOs at the Beijing conference.

The agreement worked out in June calls for a 104-acre contiguous site in Huairou for as many as 36,000 participants, improved transportation, satellite communications between the two facilities, installation of 3,500 international direct-line telephone lines and acceptance by the host Government of all NGO participants registered for the Forum by 30 April. ■

GA working on development agenda

An outline of global development goals and the means for achieving them is taking shape in negotiations being held by a United Nations General Assembly working group, which met 15 – 26 May and which will reconvene in August.

The working group is assigned by a General Assembly resolution to draft a plan that takes into account UN Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali's *Agenda for Development*, issued in May 1994, further recommendations by the Secretary-General made in November, and the results of high-level meetings such as the ministerial-level segment of the 1994 Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) and the World Hearings on Development, chaired by then-General Assembly President S.E. Insanally in June 1994 (see *Development Update* #6).

While the working group has enjoyed virtual consensus in discussing a wide range of issues — including population, environmental protection, advancement of women and investment in human resources — a number of questions as to priority and focus remain. (See interview below.)

The Group of 77 Developing Countries and China (G-77) emphasizes the importance of implementing agreements worked out during the current cycle of major UN conferences. It also wants to address its lack of influence within major financial institutions such as the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank and in the World Trade Organization, and to make worldwide economic growth a priority. The industrialized countries stress that the problems of developing countries first and foremost must be solved by those countries, and that good governance, democracy, human rights and transparency of financial and political institutions are key to the process. "We will always insist on these other dimensions, because growth without social justice and environmental protection is simply not viable," a representative of a European Union delegation told *Development Update*.

Conditionality concerns

Such insistence adds to the G-77's concern about "conditionality" — that international development assistance and financial and trade reforms are becoming contingent on meeting political requirements drawn up by the rich countries. "Our main worry is that political conditionalities are being imposed on what should be strictly economic matters," commented Enrique Manalo, of the working group's Philippine delegation. "But there's no objection to promoting good governance and human rights."

Crafting an agenda for development

***Development Update* interviewed Ambassador René Valéry Mongbé (Benin) and Swedish Ambassador Peter Oswald, co-chairmen of the General Assembly's working group on an agenda for development.**

Update: There seem to be differences within the working group over the centrality of economic growth within a global development agenda.

Mongbé: As you remember, the Secretary-General's report on an agenda for development referred to the five dimensions of development [peace as the foundation of development, economic growth as the engine of social progress, protection of the environment as the basis for sustainable development, justice as the pillar of society and democracy as the basis for good governance]. The Group of 77 has no objection to the dimensions themselves, but feels that economic growth should be more centrally placed. The developed countries are more comfortable with equal emphasis on all these elements. . . . This is an ideological battle I am not going to fight. It's clear that there are direct links between economic development and democracy, governance and human rights. But it's also clear that these other dimensions should not be made into conditionalities for progress on the economic front.

Update: What ideas are coming from the working group on restructuring the United Nations?

Mongbé: The UN has a clear mandate to address development issues. If the present structures prove not to fit this purpose, we should restructure. But first we need strengthened means and manifestations of political will and commitment from the Member States. Then we can judge if the existing structures are effective.

Update: Do the goals have to be better defined before deciding on how to restructure?

Mongbé: The UN's development goals are defined. We have spent a great amount of time and effort defining them at the extraordinary General Assembly session on development, in the UN's agenda for Africa [New Agenda for the Development of Africa in the 1990s], and at major conferences in Cartagena [UNCTAD VIII], in Rio [the Earth Summit], at the Paris conference on least developed countries, in Cairo [Conference on Population and Development] and most recently in Copenhagen [the Social Summit]. I will tell you one thing that bothers me. Some delegations in the working group — including some from the developed countries and some from G-77 — do not understand our exercise. It is not drafting a new strategy. We already have many strategies.

Our purpose is to write an agenda. An agenda, if the word means anything, is a properly selected and ordered listing of priorities and a calendar for implementation.

Update: Would this be a job for ECOSOC?

Mongbé: We are near to reaching agreement on this. Many delegations think that ECOSOC should be a coordinating body for development within the UN system. After all, that's the point of having the Economic and Social Council. But we want this to happen in a way that is acceptable to everybody. The developing countries are very cautious about the kind of powerful role the big countries are trying to give to ECOSOC, which does not represent all the nations. They say ECOSOC should not outweigh the General Assembly. This is the point our group needs to work out.

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Update: The developed country delegates in the group are stressing the need for a more efficient and effective United Nations system. Does this in fact mean a reduced UN system?

Osvald: The General Assembly resolution that mandates our working group talks about a strengthened role for the UN in the economic and social sectors. This means to some more money channelled through the UN and its agencies. It's also possible to see it as meaning a more effective channelling of development funds. Don't forget, the UN is in competition with other institutions for development resources. So it must prove the efficacy of its use of funds. This does not mean doing less.

Update: There is also concern that talk of "diversity" among developing countries will lead to less development assistance overall.

Osvald: The international community has already identified differences, such as described by the term "less developed countries." What some delegates mean is that strategies need to be tailored to the needs of countries with different levels of development. I don't find this objectionable. Other countries fear this notion will be used to split the ranks of developing countries, to pit them against each other. This is an understandable concern and we need to discuss it much further.

Update: In which areas that the working group has discussed does there seem to be agreement so far?

Osvald: In the most important part of the outline — the second section, dealing with policy and means of implementation — there is common understanding about the importance of social development, the empowerment of women, the rights of the child, population, humanitarian issues, and in large measure on the emphasis to be placed on economic growth in relation to other issues, such as democracy, human rights and participatory approaches to development. Keep in mind, however, that we are still at the stage of outlining the agenda. Some of the details under the headings I have mentioned may require further negotiation. ■

Crime Congress

The Congress approved a resolution recommending that public officials disclose all information about property they may own, refuse gifts and favours and avoid preferential financial treatment of family and friends.

Violence against women

A strongly worded resolution urges States to adopt laws against acts of violence that may victimize women and sanctions against rape, domestic violence, sexual abuse and all practices harmful to females, including the traditional practice in some societies of genital mutilation. Legal measures prohibiting harassment, intimidation or threats against women or their families, and laws regulating the acquisition and storage of firearms in the home are also recommended by the same resolution of the Congress. States are asked to take special account of women's vulnerability to violence — including murder, torture, systematic rape and sexual slavery — in situations of armed conflict.

Environmental protection

A Congress workshop discussed both the benefits and potential problems of using criminal justice systems to protect the environment. Forms of ecological crimes mentioned included the illegal disposal and trafficking of hazardous wastes, smuggling or theft of cultural treasures and newer forms such as the illicit release of genetically engineered organisms into natural environments. Proposals ranged from elaborating a detailed list of environmental crimes and establishing special police and prosecution units to an international convention on the protection of the environment. Establishment of a world environmental protection agency under UN auspices was also suggested.

Mass media

Another innovative workshop investigated the role of the mass media in crime prevention. Dramatic testimony by journalists from Russia, Kenya, India, the Philippines and the United States underscored the importance of the media's watchdog function. Participants recommended that the United Nations should reassert the "enormous importance of a free press as part of the democratic process" and commit resources for countering the negative effects of the mass media on young people and encourage, through the media, ways to eradicate violence against women, enhance respect for their dignity and discourage negative stereotyping.

Urban policy

An urban policy workshop analysed successful prevention policies, including grass-roots participation in criminal justice systems, appropriate design of housing complexes and public spaces, consultation among government agencies and between the public and the private sectors, and the strengthening of social safety nets. While highlighting workable solutions to crime, participants cautioned against growing the growing feeling of urban insecurity. Unveiled at the workshop was a global "victimization survey" conducted by the Rome-based UN Interregional Crime and Justice Research Institute (UNICRI). The study shows that more than half the urban population worldwide have been victims of crime at least once between 1988 and 1993.

Crime and migration

An ancillary workshop conducted by the International Scientific and Professional Advisory Council of the UN crime prevention and criminal justice programme produced a comprehensive investigation of the relation between crime and migration. Speakers detailed the involvement of transnational crime syndicates in trafficking in illegal aliens and identified factors that tend to make legal and illegal migrants both victims and perpetrators of crime. A report written for the Congress advocates reducing motivations for emigration, concluding that "the problem of migration cannot be solved satisfactorily at the border . . . [It] has to be solved at the frontiers of a cleaner environment, more economic development and good government." ■

Senior UN officials chart development initiatives

Food Summit planned for 1996

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Calendar 1995–1996

1995

International Year for Tolerance

24 April - 5 May
Second Preparatory Committee Meeting for the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II)
(Nairobi, Kenya)

25 April - 1 May
Fifteenth Session of the Commission on Human Settlements
(Nairobi, Kenya)

29 April - 8 May
Ninth United Nations Congress on the Prevention of Crime and the Treatment of Offenders
(Cairo, Egypt)

15 - 19 May
Meeting of States Parties to the Law of the Sea Convention
(New York, USA)

22 May
Meeting of States Parties to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, special session
(New York, USA)

30 May - 1 June
High-level Advisory Board on Sustainable Development
(New York, USA)

3 - 28 July
Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC)
(Geneva, Switzerland)

4 - 6 July
Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) High-level Segment on Africa
(Geneva, Switzerland)

24 July - 4 August
United Nations Conference on Straddling Fish Stocks and Highly Migratory Fish Stocks
(New York, USA)

7 - 18 August
Intergovernmental Negotiation Committee on Desertification
(Nairobi, Kenya)

4 - 15 September
Fourth World Conference on Women
(Beijing, China)

22 - 24 October
General Assembly Special Commemorative Meeting for the UN 50th Anniversary
(New York, USA)

24 October
United Nations 50th Anniversary

6 - 17 November
Second Meeting of the Conference of Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity
(Djakarta, Indonesia)

19 - 22 November
Habitat II International Conference on "Best Practices in Improving Living Environments"
(Dubai, United Arabs Emirates)

1996

International Year for the Eradication of Poverty

January - February
Third Preparatory Committee Meeting for the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements – Habitat II
(New York, USA)

3 - 14 June
Second United Nations Conference on Human Settlements — Habitat II
(Istanbul, Turkey)

Notice to Readers

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